

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of December 14, 2021

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, John Helfant (Police Chief), Anne Sternberg, Morgan Pierce, Lydia Petty, Bonnie Donahue, Merry Kay Shernock, Sara Lique, Paul R. Vallerand, Mike Harrigan, Kaylan Sweet, Annie Lepsky, Naomi Herring, Kierney Gaboriault, Dan Sivori, Paul Abare, Linden Polito, Kathi Tarrant, Deanna Russell, Forrest Earl Gray, Lindsay Guillette, Karen Trombly, Randy Peace, Kathleen Morrow, Cathy Terrance, Cassie Morse, Tim Swartz, Josh Sanders, Shannon Doney, Mark Fournier, Nate Poe, Britta Eberle, Amanda Zoecklein, Bianca Distano, Domenick Distano, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

- a. Bellemore Road Proposed Discontinuance.** Manager Schulz said the sole property owners on Bellemore Road (Anne and Paul Sternberg) have requested the road be privatized for safety reasons and other considerations. The Select Board members authorized starting the process with certified letters to abutting property owners, published notices in the newspaper, a warned site visit held earlier today, and this public hearing. Manager Schulz noted the site visit was held at 4:00 p.m. and was attended by himself, Highway Foreman Trent Tucker, and Select Board members Miller, Morse, and Stevens. Chair Maxwell and Board member Goodrich were not at today's site visit but had attended one at this location over three (3) years ago (08/28/18) when Bellemore Road was under consideration for discontinuance along with a number of other one-house roads. No action was taken at that time. Manager Schulz said this public hearing is the opportunity for members of the public to weigh in on this matter. Ms. Sternberg had nothing to add to the letter she submitted earlier this year requesting this road discontinuance. There being no other comments, the public hearing closed at 7:05 p.m. This matter also is on the agenda later as an action item.

- IV. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Bonnie Donahue and Lydia Petty: AARP Community Challenge Grant Project.** Ms. Donahue said she and Ms. Petty wanted to discuss the Walk Audit held earlier this summer as well as possible alternate pedestrian routes during the Main Street Bridge replacement project now scheduled for 2025. Ms. Donahue said she started working for the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans) this past August but is speaking tonight as a community member only. She said the municipality was awarded a \$18,000 AARP Community Challenge Grant that was used this past summer to create a temporary pedestrian lane along Wall Street using paint and delineators to separate walking and vehicular traffic. The paint has mostly faded after several months and the delineators have been removed for the winter. There also was outreach to the businesses and residents along this route and this feedback led to the purchase of three (3) benches as well as directional and road signs (i.e. pedestrian crossing) that will be installed next spring. The pedestrian route also will be repainted and the delineators reinstalled for one additional year of use at that time. Ms. Donahue said there would be \$5,000 in remaining grant funds after these purchases and the plan is to donate this amount to the Northfield Senior Center to be used to buy exercise equipment, etc. Board member Morse was very pleased with this suggestion as well as the other good work done with the grant funds.

Ms. Petty said a Walk Audit was held on June 28, 2021 as part of the AARP grant project. There was another component to this walk related to the planned three-month closure of the Main Street Bridge in 2025. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic will have detoured as the current bridge is removed and a new one installed. The best pedestrian route has to found that will be marked with new signage, etc. The original proposal from VTrans had people walking along Wall Street to Water Street and then up the paved sidewalks on Pearl Street and then back to North Main Street by way of Vine Street. VTrans thought this route was preferable to the shorter route along the north end of Water Street to its intersection with North Main Street due to the lack of sidewalk on stretches of the road. Ms. Petty and Ms. Donahue are proposing that the shorter route be chosen provided that existing sidewalks along the road are improved and new sidewalk installed where none exist. There also is the possibility of shortening this route even more should the existing footbridge near the intersection of Water Street and Union Street be employed. However, this would require installing a safer pedestrian railroad crossing near Fernandez Hardware or perhaps creating a temporary pedestrian path near the Police Station that would connect to the footpath leading to the footbridge. This would allow pedestrians to use the gated railroad crossing on Wall Street. Board member Morse believes the railroad was contacted about improving the Fernandez Hardware crossing several years ago but nothing was done. Now that ownership of the railroad has changed hands, perhaps new outreach should be attempted. Chair Maxwell said another suggestion from community members was the installation of a temporary pedestrian bridge parallel to the Main Street Bridge. He asked if there has been any research into this possibility. Ms. Petty said they had not looked into this but it might be worth investigating. Many people living south of Main Street Bridge use it regularly as a walking route to Kenyon's Hardware Store, the Dollar General, etc. Chair Maxwell said it might be possible to have VTrans provide a temporary bridge at a reduced price. He would like Manager Schulz to look into this. Ms. Petty said that might be a good short-term solution but improving the sidewalks, etc. along the proposed pedestrian detour would yield long-term benefits. Mark Fournier asked if there ever had been any consideration of creating a pedestrian underpass near the Common that would allow people to pass under the railroad tracks. Chair Maxwell has never heard that suggestion before but asked Mr. Fournier to develop a proposal that the Select Board members could investigate further. Chair Maxwell and the other Board members then thanked Ms. Donahue and Ms. Petty for the valuable information provided tonight and for all the good work they have done with the AARP grant funds.

VI. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewal: The Woods at Wihakowi.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. Manager Schulz said this application for next year has been presented earlier than normal but he has spoken with Police Chief John Helfant and there are no concerns about this establishment's application. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 23, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Goodrich abstaining.**
- b. **November 30, 2021 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-2, with Board members Morse and Stevens abstaining.**
- c. **December 7, 2021 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Chair Maxwell abstaining.**

VIII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #11-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #11-12 in the amount of \$1,929,081.62. Board member Goodrich noted a \$3,992 charge for repairing the 2020 Western Star truck. She thought this was a lot of money to spend on a relatively new vehicle. Manager Schulz agreed and said he would check to see if any of this work (new shuttle valve, adjusted pump pressure, etc.) was covered under warranty. Board member Goodrich saw a \$4,137 payment for work on the South Main Street Sidewalk Project. She asked if this was the final payment for this project. Manager Schulz confirmed it was and said he had forwarded copies of all project invoices to VTrans in order to complete the reimbursement process. Chair Maxwell noted that of the total warrant amount, \$1,163,800 represented property taxes collected by the municipality and then forwarded to Paine Mountain School District. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through November 28, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$110,293.68. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

IX. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Bellemore Road Proposed Discontinuance.** Manager Schulz said should the Select Board members decide to privatize Bellemore Road tonight, there would be a thirty (30) day appeal period. After that, the road would be discontinued, the right-of-way revert to the property owner, and VTrans would be notified that the road would be privatized. This would result in the municipality's total amount of Class 3 Highway being reduced by Bellemore Road's length, which is one-tenth of a mile. Chair Maxwell said on his previous visit to the road, he had been concerned about possible municipal liability should our snow plows cause any roadside damage along this narrow road. Privatizing this road, as the property owners have requested, would eliminate this possibility. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to discontinue Bellemore Road. Board member Stevens asked if this process could be reversed should the current or future property owners reconsider this decision. Chair Maxwell said there is a process for this that would include the property owner obtaining a survey proving that the road meets our road standards. Craig Pierce is an abutting property owner who was notified of the possible road discontinuance as required by state law. He does not oppose the privatization of this road but has concerns about access to his property, which is just north of Bellemore Road along Onion River Road. He is concerned that the municipal plows will leave large snow deposits in the road that will make his property inaccessible. As this section of Onion River Road is Class 4 Highway, Mr. Pierce has maintained it himself in the past but doesn't want the situation made worse and become something he can't handle himself. Manager Schulz said he and Road Foreman Tucker would be glad to meet with Mr. Pierce on site to discuss this and make sure the status quo is maintained. Mr. Pierce thought this was a good idea. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Stony Brook Bridge Repair Project Bids.** Manager Schulz said the bids for this project were discussed at the last regular meeting (11/23/21). Daniels Construction was the apparent low bidder at \$364,685 but the bid award was delayed due to questions about how long the bridge would be out of commission while being repaired, when the project would begin and be completed, whether there would be acceptable detours for school buses, etc. Manager Schulz reached out to Daniels Construction and they confirmed the information contained in the bid documents, i.e. the project would start in early May 2022 and be completed by mid-June 2022, the bridge would be closed to traffic for about thirty (30) days, etc. Manager Schulz also discussed the matter with the school bus company and they had no real concerns about possible route detours. Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Stevens, to award the Stony Brook Bridge Repair Project to Daniels Construction for their bid amount of \$364,685. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Discussion of Possible Local Mask Mandate.** Chair Maxwell said Board member Miller had asked for this matter to be put on tonight's agenda due to the recent upsurge of positive COVID-19 tests in Vermont over the past few months and the increasing risk of infection due to the new omicron variant. Board member Miller confirmed his concerns and noted a recent state law (S.1) signed by Governor Phil Scott allows municipalities to approve their own face mask rules as an alternative to the previous statewide mandate. He noted the Select Board did approve a face covering resolution a year ago (11/24/20) that encouraged local businesses to request that their employees and customers wear face coverings indoors whenever practical. The resolution also imposed a mask mandate on municipal employees and also required members of the public entering municipal facilities to be masked. This resolution expired when Governor Scott lifted his State of Emergency declaration on June 15, 2021. Board member Miller now believes due to the recent upsurge, it might be a good idea to approve new local rules regarding face coverings when indoors. According to the new state law, any local rules would be in effect for forty-five (45) days and then subject to renewal for thirty (30) day periods. Board member Miller favors the wording in the COVID-19 Emergency Order approved earlier this month by the Montpelier City Council and believes this should be the model for any new mask covering resolution to be approved by the Northfield Select Board. He then read Montpelier's emergency order in its entirety, which is as follows:

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY ORDER:
WEARING FACE COVERINGS REQUIRED INDOORS**

WHEREAS, the State of Vermont Legislature has passed S.1. giving Cities and Towns the authority to set mask-mandates for their own Communities, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to recommends the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus and its variants, and to help prevent people who may unknowingly have the virus from transmitting it to others; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 and its variants remain a present and continuously changing and growing health threat to residents of, and visitors to, Montpelier and a significant threat to vulnerable populations; and

WHEREAS, wearing a face covering is an important act of safety and empathy that those in Montpelier can do in an effort to protect others from an infection that may be unknowingly carried.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Montpelier City Council hereby issues the following COVID-19 Emergency Order pursuant to the authority granted in S.1.:

**WEARING FACE COVERINGS REQUIRED INDOORS
INSIDE ANY BUILDING THAT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
WITHIN MONTPELIER CITY LIMITS:**

Requirement to Wear Face Covering:

Effective immediately, any person, whether an employee, a customer, or a visitor who enters a public or privately owned building that is open to the public must wear face coverings over their nose and mouth while inside the building- regardless of their vaccination status.

Exceptions:

In accordance with the past issued Vermont State Guidance, found in State of Vermont Executive Department Addendum 14 to Executive Order 01-20, masks are not recommended for strenuous outdoor activity, anyone under the age of 2, anyone with a medical condition that is complicated or irritated by a facial covering, or anyone with difficulty breathing. If anyone has a medical condition that is complicated by facial coverings like a cloth mask a face shield is an appropriate alternative and this should be worn instead of a mask. Masks may also be removed if they frustrate the essential purpose of the business.

Posting of Requirement:

Each building that is open to the public shall post signage at the entrance and at other appropriate locations stating that visitors are required to wear face coverings by order of the Montpelier City Council.

Effective Period:

As per statutes, this Order shall remain in effect for 45 days unless the Montpelier City Council amends, rescinds, or suspends this Order. The City Council will revisit this order within the 45 days to determine whether it shall be extended for an additional 30 days.

Enforcement:

A public list will be made available by the City of any business, company, or public facility that has been confirmed to be noncompliant with requiring masks indoors and have been notified of such noncompliance at least three (3) times. Reports of non-compliance can be directed to the City by anyone and will be investigated by the City Manager or their designees. The City will publish the list online on the City's website and printed for viewing in person at City Hall.

Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve a face Coverings Resolution for the Town of Northfield based on the language contained in the City of Montpelier Emergency Order. Board member Goodrich said there was a prolonged discussion of this matter over a year ago when the local resolution was approved. She now believes a local mandate based on the Montpelier model would not be effective as there would be no way to enforce it and it would only create dissension and hostility within the community. Board member Goodrich believes mask wearing is a good way to limit the spread of COVID-19 but does not support mandating usage. Board member Morse believes the Montpelier model would have to adapted to Northfield conditions, which would include simplified language and additional exceptions for required indoors mask usage. Board member Morse offered an amendment to the motion to make the Montpelier model fit Northfield. He received an email today from a mask mandate opponent who stated mask wearing doesn't prevent the user from contracting COVID-19. Board member Morse agreed but added that proper mask usage does help limit the spread of the disease. He noted doctors and dentists wore masks in the pre-pandemic period in order to limit their exposure to possible infecting agents. Board member Morse said in some Northfield businesses you see almost no employees or customers wearing masks, which he felt was wrong given the risk of indoors contamination. He would, however, exempt restaurants, auto repair facilities, and other businesses with particular circumstances from any mandate. Board member Stevens agreed with much of what Board member Morse has said. Chair Maxwell noted that a year ago when the Select Board was debating whether to compel indoors mask wearing, he felt that a mandate made no sense if it could not be enforced. However, he did support the approved resolution that encouraged indoor mask usage. Chair Maxwell asked recently about the COVID-19 situation at Norwich University (NU). According to its online COVID-19 Dashboard, over ninety-five (95%) of its employees have been vaccinated and over ninety percent (90%) of NU students. Out of 9,557 COVID-19 tests taken during the current Fall 2021 semester, there have been seventy-five (75) positive tests, which is a positivity rate of 0.78%. According to the Vermont Department of Health, on average three (3) Northfield residents test positive for COVID-19 each week. In light of these numbers, Chair Maxwell still believes a resolution encouraging indoors mask usage makes more sense than any mandate. He then opened the floor to public comment.

Kaylan Sweet is a longtime Northfield resident who has owned and operated O'Maddi's Deli & Café on Depot Square for the past eleven (11) years. She said the COVID-19 pandemic hit her business very hard and she had to change her normal operations in order to keep going. There was much confusion in the beginning regarding how restaurants would be allowed to operate but Ms. Sweet followed the rules and only allowed take-out orders for several months. When inside dining was again permitted, she installed the mandatory signage regarding mask wearing, maintained proper social distancing, etc. However, Ms. Sweet noted the inconsistency in such requirements for restaurants as there were different rules in different states with varying levels of enforcement while some states and countries never imposed any mask wearing requirements. Ms. Sweet felt some local businesses would refuse to comply with any new mask wearing requirement. She also felt the Northfield Police Department would not be able to enforce any new mandates and, in fact, would better occupy their time on actual law enforcement activities. Ms. Sweet noted that some people now refuse to shop in a business with a mask requirement and she doesn't want Northfield businesses to lose patronage as a result. She feels very strongly that the government should not compel individuals to wear face masks against their will.

Amanda Zoecklein has lived in Northfield for four (4) years and has two (2) small children. She strongly supports a local mask mandate since Northfield has seen a surge in positive COVID-19 tests. Ms. Zoecklein noted that just over half of Northfield residents have been vaccinated, which is a lower percentage than the state overall. She understands people would like to make their own decisions regarding mask wearing but did not feel the practice was that onerous a burden given the benefits. Ms. Zoecklein said the Montpelier model has exceptions and is unenforceable but at the very least it provides individuals with the option of deciding whether or not to shop in a business where mask wearing is either required or strongly encouraged.

Annie Lepsky is a part-time Northfield resident and she feels strongly that the government should not tell people what to do with their own bodies. She also feels a mask mandate would create a slippery slope that might lead to vaccination mandates for the general public. Ms. Lepsky said in the past similar public health mandates have been used by the government to target minorities and other disadvantaged groups. She would not like to see non-compliance with mask wearing and other COVID-19 mandates become criminalized. If people want to shop only in businesses with mask mandates, they already have several options to do so. Ms. Lepsky believes a mandate would be a bad precedent and mask wearing should be encouraged but not compelled. She added Vermont is the state with the highest percentage of vaccinated residents and ending the previous statewide mask mandate was the proper reward to residents for achieving this status.

Mark Fournier feels mask mandates have had the effect of dividing communities, which often results in hostile interactions between those with differing viewpoints. He also believes the Montpelier model with its “naughty list” of non-compliant businesses was governmental overkill. Mr. Fournier said with the various variants emerging, it now appears COVID-19 will be around for some time and the decision on whether or not to wear a mask in public should be left to the individual.

Randy Peace owns and operates the Northfield Barber Shop located on Depot Square. He has spent a lot of time researching the current pandemic as well as historical ones. He agrees with Mr. Fournier that COVID-19 will be with us for some time. When customers have come into his shop in recent months, he has noted that many of those choosing to wear masks don’t use them correctly (i.e. leaving the mouth and/or nose exposed) or don’t wash them properly, allowing them to become unhygienic. Given this situation, Mr. Peace has decided to let his customers make their own decisions on whether or not to mask while in his establishment. He has no problem putting up a sign saying mask use is encouraged but feels a mandate would be wrong as well as unpopular in this community.

Josh Sanders served in the US Army for sixteen (16) years and now sees another form of terrorism in this community with people trying to tell others how to live and attempting to compel certain types of behavior. He felt imposing such mandates should not be a Select Board responsibility and that the Select Board members should focus instead on maintaining our roads and public utilities.

Paul R. Vallerand is a former Northfield resident as well as a past and future independent candidate for the Vermont State Senate. He is the father of a special needs child and is concerned about the long-term effects of compelled mask wearing on American youth. He cited a Brown University study that indicated a lowering of IQ scores for babies born since the pandemic began. The reasons for this are unclear but possible explanations include lack of direct non-verbal facial interaction with masked caregivers, lack of engagement with other infants, etc. Mr. Vallerand is a strong opponent of mask mandates since he feels they do much more damage than any possible benefits they might provide.

Carolyn Stevens is a longtime Northfield resident and she understands the concerns many people have about the government telling you what to do with your own body. However, she noted that it has been proven that mask wearing and social distancing have been effective in curbing the spread of COVID-19. Ms. Stevens will not shop in any store where masks are not worn by employees and customers. She also noted that we do not eliminate speed limits on our roads as unenforceable just because not all speeders are caught and punished. Ms. Stevens agreed that the fatality rate for COVID-19 is relatively low compared to other diseases but many survivors suffer long-term effects, which can include fatigue, shortness of breath, difficulty concentrating, sleep disorders, loss of taste and smell, etc. Ms. Stevens felt Northfield residents need to think more about what is good for the community as a whole rather than just focus on their own individual preferences.

Dan Sivori doesn't like the idea of maintaining and publicizing lists of non-compliant businesses as in the Montpelier model. He felt after two (2) years of the pandemic, people generally have made up their minds regarding mask wearing and no new mandates are going to change that. Mr. Sivori doesn't feel Northfield should have a mask mandate as residents already have the choice to patronize specific businesses based on whether mask wearing is compelled, encouraged, etc. on the premises.

Kathleen Morrow is a former Northfield resident and an organic farmer. She believes there is strong evidence that use of alternate medicines is much more effective than mask wearing in combatting the effects of the pandemic. Linden Polito has seen several studies regarding wearing of protective masks that indicate they are ineffective in preventing infection, etc. even when worn correctly. In fact, some medical facilities stopped using them altogether and have seen lower infection rates. Ms. Polito feels mask wearing actually causes more problems than it solves. This includes psychological damage, breathing difficulties, etc. Mask wearing should be an individual choice. Many people have medical conditions that are made worse by wearing masks and Ms. Polito doesn't feel they should be forced to explain their personal health issues whenever someone wants them to wear a mask in a public space. She further felt personal autonomy should be paramount in such matters and would like society to return to some sense of normalcy without division or coercion.

Ms. Zoecklein believes the Brown University study to which Mr. Vallerand referred has been disparaged by other researchers who felt the study's method for determining infant IQ was flawed. She also believes masks have been shown to be very effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19 when worn correctly and consistently. Ms. Zoecklein believes the number of new positive tests in Northfield each week shows the need for some local action in response.

Paul Abare said millions of Americans have served in our armed forces and many have perished in order to protect the rights of individuals. He felt mask mandates are a violation of the freedoms for which they fought. Mike Harrigan doesn't believe the Select Board members have a proper motion to approve since there is no final document on the table but just a model document from another community. Cathy Terrance's daughter is a nurse who has been vaccinated but still tested positive for COVID-19. Her daughter has to wear a mask all day, which is a twelve (12) hour shift, which she feels is very unhealthy. Her daughter-in-law also tested positive despite her vaccinations and mask wearing.

Ms. Sweet has done a lot of personal research on COVID-19 as there is much information available for those who look for it. She thinks it is unfortunate so many people are overly fearful due to what is presented by mainstream media. Ms. Sweet feels most people are done with complying and she will not put up any more COVID-19 related signs in her restaurant. She noted that schools are compensated for expenses associated with mask mandates but most businesses are not. Ms. Sweet asked if the Northfield Police department has been asked about their ability to enforce a mandate. Manager Schulz has spoken to Police Chief John Helfant and he has his own concerns about possible enforcement.

Naomi Herring asked why there isn't a medical person on hand at the local schools throughout the school day. Chair Maxwell said that was a question for the school board as the Select Board doesn't have any authority over the schools. He then called the question. Chair Maxwell then confirmed the amendment offered by Board member Morse was not adopted. Board member Morse confirmed it died for a lack of a second.
Motion failed 1-3-1, with Board member Miller voting in the affirmative; Board members Goodrich, Maxwell, and Morse in the negative; and Board member Stevens abstaining.

The meeting then went into a five (5) minute recess.

- d. **Grand List 2021 Errors & Omissions.** Manager Schulz said the Board of Listers is asking to have a parcel revalued before the end of the calendar year deadline. The parcel is located at 429 Central Street and is owned by Norwich University. A dwelling and garage on the property was razed in February 2021 but the Listers were never formally informed of this action. The property's value has been reduced from \$225,100 to \$31,000, which will result in a \$4,000 loss of property tax revenue. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stephens, to approve the requested 2021 Grand List adjustment. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- e. **Turkey Hill Farm Lease Agreement.** Manager Schulz said a revised lease agreement has been prepared for Select Board approval. As this matter involves contract negotiations, it will be discussed later in the meeting in executive session.
- f. **Authorize Select Board Chair to Review and Approve Future Payroll and Operating Expenses through December 2021 [24 V.S.A. §961(b)].** As the Select Board will be cancelling their next regular meeting (12/28/21) due to the holiday season, they need to take action that will allow Chair Maxwell to approve the next warrant, biweekly payroll, etc. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to authorize Chair Maxwell to review and approve future payroll and operating expenses through December 2021. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Zoning Regulations Update.** Manager Schulz announced that the Planning Commission applied for and received a \$21,000 grant. The funds will be used to hire a consultant to assist with the updating of local zoning regulations to better conform with state law and the Northfield Town Plan that was adopted two (2) years ago. The Planning Commission Chair was very pleased with this development as it will greatly expedite the revision process.
- b. **Proposed FY 2022/2023 Town Budget.** Manager Schulz noted the next budget meeting will be held this coming Thursday (12/16/21) at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room. A discussion of the Ambulance Service budget has been added to the original agenda as the Ambulance Chief was unable to attend an earlier meeting.
- c. **Water Main Replacement Project.** Manager Schulz said at the most recent Joint Meeting of the Utility Commissions (12/06/21), there was a discussion of using state grant funds to replace the one hundred (100) plus year water mains located along Main Street. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) is very willing to provide funds for such projects so it would be best to develop engineering plans as soon as possible so that the project is "shovel ready" when funding becomes available. An engineering agreement with the Dufresne Group needs to be drafted so that the municipality can apply for a state grant that would cover half of the project's engineering costs.
- d. **Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Community Visit.** At a previous meeting, there was the suggestion that Manager Schulz should contact VCRD to schedule another Community Visit to Northfield. The last one held here was twenty (20) years ago. Manager Schulz has made this outreach and a VCRD representative will attend a January 2022 Select Board meeting to discuss the process. Due to the pandemic, VCRD's schedule is rather full at the moment but they might be able to provide a truncated community visit in the near future.

XI. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds.** Board member Stevens noted at the last regular meeting (11/23/21) Merry Kay Shernock offered to spearhead the process of holding a number of community gatherings in order to obtain public feedback on how the ARPA funds Northfield will be receiving should be spent. He asked if there has been any further progress on this. Chair Maxwell said he has been preoccupied with other matters recently but will reach out to Ms. Shernock regarding the next steps to be taken.
- b. **Christmas on the Common.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank the members of the Northfield Activity Group for last Friday night's holiday celebration on the Common. There was carol singing along with a visit from Santa Claus and his elf. The tree was donated by Paul Abare and Chair Maxwell wanted to thank him for his generosity.

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Elroy Hill: Mask Mandate Discussion and ARPA Funds.** Mr. Hill wanted to thank the Select Board members for the good job done in allowing tonight's discussion regarding a possible local mask mandate. He was pleased that everyone who wanted to speak was allowed the opportunity. Mr. Hill also believes that a good use of ARPA funds would be to extend municipal sewerlines southward along Vermont Route 12A in order to protect the Well Field from possible contamination. Chair Maxwell said quite a few people also have suggested this would be a prudent use of these funds.

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss two (2) separate contract negotiations with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:35 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:15 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to authorize Manager Schulz to sign the lease agreement with Turkey Hill Maple. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

XIV. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 11, 2022.